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ABSTRACT

An EPDA Experienced Teachers Fellowship Program designed for elementary and secondary reading teachers was conducted at Loyola University and had as its chief aim the training of teachers to improve the reading instruction of disadvantaged youths with learning problems caused by their communication backgrounds and inability to read. The program sought to provide the participant with (1) a substantial background in communications skills, (2) an understanding of the psychoeducational dynamics of the reading process, (3) an understanding of the communication problems of the disadvantaged, (4) a background of professional readings and experiences, and (5) the guidance and supervision necessary to enable participants to evaluate their professional growth. To accomplish these objectives, a sequential program provided background information, analysis of videotaped diagnostic procedures, and experiences in parish schools with diagnostic testing and individual remedial instruction. The program staff, which was interdepartmental and crossdiscipline, worked closely with the participants both on campus and in the schools. Participants were introduced to and used a variety of material and techniques. Evaluation of the program was jointly provided by faculty, participants, and school supervisors, and their consensus was that the program was an enlightening and enriching experience. (VJ)

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THE TRAINING OF READING TEACHERS FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

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INTRODUCTION

There is an educational lag in communication skills of disadvantaged children, reinforced by teachers having little understanding of the unique problems in communication skills among those children and the lack of depth training among teachers in methods to remedy this situation.

In 1950, one child out of every ten in America's fourteen largest cities was "culturally deprived". By 1960 the figure was one out of three. It is estimated that this year one out of two children will be "culturally deprived".

Reading is the basic tool of learning. It is the means by which differentiating instruction must begin. The disadvantaged child may relate to his reality through reading. Reading is the tool for inducting the child into his culture most economically and basically.

To improve the reading instruction of these disadvantaged youth who had learning problems and who adjusted poorly because of communication background and inability to read, Loyola University of New Orleans conducted an EPDA Experienced Teachers Fellowship Program in Reading Instruction for Elementary and Secondary High School Teachers.

OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the program were:

1. to provide a substantial background in communication skills to enable the participants to serve as teacher-consultants in their school systems.

2. to provide its instructional program the kinds of experiences, in appropriate sequence, which enable teachers to develop deep understanding of the psychoeducational dynamics of the reading process for disadvantaged children.
3. to provide understanding of the communication problems among disadvantaged children, and to also provide practical experience in dealing in a supervised diagnostic and remedial situation with disadvantaged children who have reading problems.
4. to program professional readings that will concretize learning from the formalized part of the program; provide professional visits to different settings that will give dimension and meaning to concepts developed in the formalized program; provide opportunities for participants to listen and react to authorities in the field of reading on pertinent problems and to provide for an evaluation of these activities by the participants and staff.
5. to provide guidance and supervision on an individual basis to the participants so that they will be able to evaluate their own professional growth and also discuss particular communication problems with staff members.

STAFF

The organizational structure consisted of the utilization of interdepartmental and cross disciplinary structures of learning, involving psychology, sociology, economics, communications, reading and computer sciences. The staff representing these disciplines had varying backgrounds which had an effective influence on the program. The effectiveness was further implemented by using consultants, which, along with the block structure and team teaching approach, made for an enriched learning experience.

SCHEDULE

During the first week of the program a diagnostic survey of the fellows was made to learn their knowledge of reading. In view of the various backgrounds, diverse experiences, and limited knowledge of reading and related disciplines for the disadvantaged, the staff deemed it best not to have the participants in the schools at the outset. The first two months of the program were devoted strictly to supplying the fellows with necessary background information.

During the second month of the program, part of the instruction consisted of videotaping the complete diagnostic procedures for problem readers. A second grade boy and sixth grade girl were used for this purpose. The fellows observed the videotaping on monitors and through two-way windows. The videotaping was discussed and replayed in subsequent seminar sessions. We believe that witnessing this first-handed operation had much merit. Later on the fellows were observed by staff members while diagnosing initial cases.

Beginning in November and continuing for the balance of the semester, two mornings a week were spent in the schools observing, doing diagnostic testing, and beginning remedial instruction with one child. During the second semester, two full days were spent in the schools doing diagnostic and remedial work on a one-to-one basis with two students, one hour each, and with small groups during the remainder of the day.

In April the fellows spent four days each week, Monday through Thursday, in the schools, During this time the Director and reading staff visited each one of them. On Friday of each week they returned to the campus for seminars and other forms of instructions.

About one half the month of May was spent diagnosing and screening individual students with reading problems for the summer internship program. Some of this was done in the school and some at the university.

TECHNIQUES

A variety of new techniques, materials and equipment were used. Four reading programs or series were involved:

1. The Macmillan Reading Program by Harris and Clark.
2. The Sullivan Associates Programmed Reading.
3. The Open Court Reading Program.
4. The Open Highway Series.

Also used was individualized reading from Scholastic Book Services. This provided for individual differences with exercises varying in rate and style of learning. It included the children's involvement in their own learning activities, development of positive self-concepts, opportunity for inquiry and an awareness of the purpose behind learning activities.

To meet some of the individual needs of each student that could not be met by using the four basic series and Individualized Reading from Scholastic, the following material was utilized:

1. Special Reading Approaches

   VAKT Technique, Individualized Reading, and Language Experience was used to enable students to learn by other methods than usual classroom procedures, especially adapted to the non-achieving disadvantaged child.

2. Word Analysis and Sight Vocabulary

Used to enable pupils to increase proficiency in areas in which disabilities exist and provide teachers with a wide variety of materials on different levels of difficulty and utilizing different approaches to learning were:

Reading and Phonics (Lippincott)
Phonics We Use (Lyon and Carnahan)
Phonics Skilltext (Merrill)
Dolch Word Games (Garrard)
Listen and Learn with Games (American Interstate Comp.)
Reading and Spelling Games (Lyon and Carnahan)
Language Master (Bell and Howell)
Spelling Series (Laidlaw)
MacMillan Spectrum (MacMillan)
Phonics in a Nut Shell (Eden, Pub.)

3. Comprehension

To enable disadvantaged pupils who lack proficiency in understanding the opportunity to increase their comprehension using varied techniques and levels of achievement, the following were helpful:

Read-Study-Think (Weekly Reader)
Reading for Understanding (S.R.A.)
Listen and Think Series (E.D.L.)
Reading for Meaning (Lippincott)
Readers Digest Skill Test (Readers Digest)
McCall Crabbs Test Lesson (Columbia)
Building Reader Power (Char. Merrill)
Controlled Reader (E.D.L.)
MacMillan Spectrum (MacMillan)

4. Multi-Purpose Skills Material

Used to supplement the previously listed materials by providing additional materials on a variety of skills, and providing for specific areas not covered by other materials, were:

Diagnostic Reading Workbooks (Charles Merrill)
Building Reading Power Lab (Charles Merrill)
Reading Laboratories (S.R.A.)
Specific Skill Series (Barnell Loft)
Spectrum of Reading Skills (McMillan)
Controlled Reader Films (E.D.L.)
Mott Basic Language Program (Mott)
Distar (S.R.A.)
RSVP (Anser)

5. High Interest-Low Readability Material

Providing challenging material to motivate reluctant readers to develop the desire to read for pleasure were:

Morgan Bay Mystery (Harry Wagner)
Americans All Series (Field Educ. Publ)
Kaleidoscope (Field Educ. Publ.)
Dan Frontier (Benefic Press)
Action Series (Scholastic)
P lat Libraries (S.R.A.)
Chevelence Flags (Field Educ. Publ.)
Main Stream (Chas. E. Merril)

EVALUATION

A variety of techniques were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the fellowship program. These included:

Faculty

Evaluation was a continuous process by the faculty of the program who had regular informal meetings with the director to discuss and evaluate the program. Weekly summaries of material covered were submitted by the faculty. These were reviewed to determine if the specific objectives of the program were realized.

The director and his designated representative visited the participants while they were working in the schools. These visits consisted of observation of the participants while teaching, followed by private conferences.

Meetings were held with the fellows and the three staff members who were responsible for the bulk of the reading instructions. These meetings were held on the average of every three weeks to carry out a continuous evaluation of the program. Fellows were continually asked to submit comments and specific questions concerning topics which they wished to be included in the program.

School Supervisors of Participants

A questionnaire was sent to the school supervisors of each participant near the end of the academic year to evaluate the effectiveness of each fellow's performance, to solicit in what respect the fellowship program was commendable and to seek recommendations for improvement..

Analysis of the responses of the twenty school supervisors' progress reports of the fellowship program shows that an excellent rating was given to eight of the thirteen items by eighty to ninety-five percent of the supervisors.

Participants

The participants evaluated the consultants, lecturers and seminars by the use of a rating form. Seventy-nine percent of the items listed in the rating form were rated highest by 45 to 70% of the participants.

The consensus was that it was a wonderful, enlightening and enriching experience. Help was given when and at the time it was needed. Staff members were always available for consultation and assistance in suggesting, selecting and evaluating materials. They shared freely and readily their experience and "know how" in teaching reading. Their understanding and constructive criticism assisted in helping the children and added to the personal knowledge of the participants.

The seminar sessions provided valuable opportunities for evaluation of new materials and techniques, for presenting and discussing actual case studies, etc. We were able to seek and give help to each other and also make discoveries about our own situations.

CONCLUSION

The fellowship program was effective in acquainting staff members from other disciplines with the problems of the disadvantaged with special emphasis on reading instruction. In the future it is expected that they will include more reference to these problems in their regular classroom instruction.

The program has also been effective in generating an interest in the surrounding parishes in the problems of the disadvantaged. Much of this interest was generated by the close cooperation between the director, the fellows, and the parish schools.

The participants, from those who had had no previous experience of training in reading to those who were competent and had excellent backgrounds, all achieved a new insight into materials and methods of instruction and the importance of and knowledge of techniques for locating and treating specific problems. Even more important was the change in attitude toward the disadvantaged. This attitude of no understanding of the problems and isolation from the problems changed to understanding and a desire to help and an ability of being able to provide the needed remediation.